

Patola: A Double *Ikat* Fabric from Gujarat

Patola is possibly derived from the Sanskrit word "**Pattakula**", meaning a silk fabric. It is a legendary heritage of Indian textiles from North Gujarat. A double ikat silk fabric in which both warp as well as weft threads are dyed into a complicated pattern, It is one of most complex textile-weaving techniques in the world and highly priced fabric.

In Gujarat, it is worn by the ladies during the social and religious ceremonial activities. Traditionally in Gujarat it was worn by Hindus, Jains and Vohra Muslims but was also used on special occasions in Maharashtra and South India.



Patan in north Gujarat is the most famous centre for weaving Patolas. The hereditary weavers of patola in Patan are the Salvis who are primarily Jains but some of them may belong to the Hindu community. The Salvi family of master weavers has thrice been awarded the National award for Master Crafts Persons (1978, 1987 & 1997) by Dr. Abdul Kalam. This family has also bagged the Shilpguru award.

The oldest known historical evidence of the existence of patola can be found in the Ajanta frescoes then in Kerala in the wall paintings of the Mattancheri and Padmanabhapuram palaces dated 17th and 18th centuries.

It is recorded in the religious books like Ramayan & Narsinha Puran that Patola were used in great ceremony and in the marriage as a holy charm dressing. In the period of Ram-Rajya, king Janak had presented Patola to Sitaji (Wife of God Ram). Also in the period of great Lord Krishan, Narsinha Mehta (great devotee of Lord Krishan) had presented Patola to Kunvarbai.

In Gujarat literature the earliest mention of patolas appears around the eleventh century. Patolas are also frequently mentioned in the Kunvar-bai-nu-Mameru of Narasimha Mehta, a fifteenth century court poet, by Premchand, a seventeenth century poet, and several others.

The **design** in a patola is based on traditional motif called "**Bhat**". These designs include:

Chhabdi/ Chaabri bhat: the basket pattern. This was largely used by Brahmins of the Surat area. This design is generally exported to Indonesia.



Fulvali bhat: flowering pattern. This has affinities with the motif known as ber jail, berries and trellis pattern.

Paan bhat: papal leaf pattern. This is an important motif used along with following shrubs which are highly stylized.

Ratan chown bhat: jewel mosaic, the designs include floral motifs in geometrical form

Akhrot bhat: walnut motif. This is similar to dada bhat or ball motif.

Okhar bhat: water crossing design. Some opine that it implies akhrot bhat ore walnut design

Nari Kunjar bhat: Most expensive design parrot women and elephant design.

Popat kunjar: The parrot and elephant are used in the design

Wagh bar hathi bhat/ Wagh kunjar bhat: : a design consisting of tigers and 12 elephants.

Vohra Cheer bhat: a geometrical pattern usually worn by Vohra Muslims at weddings and on auspicious days.

Maharas bhat: a design depicting women dancing keeping rhythm with sticks in their hands- a typical Gujarat folk design.

Chowkhadi bhat: a diaper with double outline floral design

***Motifs of Patola** though few are strictly Indian and traditional consisting of stylized flowers, foliage, creepers, birds, animals, human figures and geometrical designs*

From more than 100 of years the material used in patola have always been pure silk with vegetable or natural colors.

There is a famous proverb in Gujarati

"PADI PATOLA BHAT FATEY PAN FITE NAHI"

(design on patola will never perish though it may be worn out).

The colors for dyeing are extracted from the nature made from Marigold Flower, Onion Skin, Pomegranate rinds, Madder roots, Lac, Catechu, Cochineal, Indigo, manjistha, ratanjyot, mendhi, katha, kesudo along with different mordant like alum, tin chloride, ferrous sulphate, copper sulphate, Tennic Acid, Oxalic Acid, Potassium Dichromate etc. Patolas have no reverse side both the sides have equal

Technique:

In patola warp and weft silk threads are tied separately with cotton thread on the portions already marked out in conformity with the proposed design in the fabric. This tied portion is meant to remain unexposed to the color while dyeing. United portion which has absorbed one color may be tied while dyeing in another color. Tying untying, retying and dyeing in different shades are the main features of this process.

After completion of dyeing work of warps & wefts, the threads of the warp of different repeats of a pattern are put together in a sequence on the loom, so that the design becomes visible. The threads of wefts are wound on to bobbins and kept in the bamboo shuttle for weaving process.

The patola is woven on a primitive hand operated harness loom made out of rosewood and bamboo strips. The loom lies at a slant, with the left side being lower than the right side. The bamboo shuttle is made to move to and fro through warp sheds. Each weft thread is thoroughly examined and matched with each part of the warp design pattern while weaving. The tension of the warp threads are removed by the help of needle after every time weaving of 8" to 10" of fabric. Patola weaving is a highly accurate just a positioning of warp and weft of similar color to obtain perfect design and



harmony. and while weaving the craftsperson has to ensure that the warp and weft threads intersect perfectly to produce the pattern. The process is labour intensive, time consuming and requires high order of skill and dexterity. It takes three to four months to prepare tie- dyed design on warp and weft threads for one sari of 6 yards length by 48" width. Two Salvis (weavers) working together weave just about 8" to 9" a day. It takes 40 to 50 days to weave a sari. Thus 4 to 5 persons take periods of 5 to 6 months to complete a sari depending on the intricacy of the design.



Significance:

Considered to bring in luck and prosperity, a Patola Sari is often passed on as an heirloom or worn during baby showers.

Both the sides of Patola sari display the same design. Each sari can survive over a century without losing color.

On a patola, the square represents security in every aspect of life. The elephant, parrot, peacock and 'kalash' are considered 'saubhagya' (good luck).

Patola was considered a holy cloth in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia. They believe that it had magical powers that could protect them from evil



Revival:

Owing to the skilled craftsmen and the government's apathy towards the restoration of Patola, this textile art is on the verge of extinction. The young generation of Salvi family is trying to build up a Patola museum that would be an ultimate source of this beautiful heritage of India.

Patola Imitations:

In some villages of Rajkot and Surendranagar districts of Gujarat, single ikat replicas of patolas are woven. However the designs are very simple as compared to patola of Patan. Since this is not a time consuming weaving like Patolas this is cheaper and produced fast.

In the state of Andhra Pradesh , the ikat process is known as Pagdu bandhu, buddavaasi and chitki. Some of the weavers claim to have originally migrated from Saurashtra and settled in Chirala, which formally produced the finest weft ikat in the form of rumals used by rich Muslims. Double ikat was also woven, but of simple geometrical designs than those of Gujarat. Ikat was introduced in Pochampalli near Hyderabad in the beginning of this century and today the patolas of Patan are imitated fairly successfully.

Cotton telia rumals large almost square pieces with geometrical patterns-are still made in Chirala. Border.Cotton rumals and saris are also woven in Pochampalli. The rumal is always surrounded by



a wide single-colored border. There is a large square , which is again divided into smaller squares. The motifs consist of diamonds, or flowers, birds and elephants within squares. In Chirala, apart from traditional motifs, contemporary motifs like the aeroplane, clock etc. The colors used include red, chocolate, black, white and occasionally pink. The basic difference between the double ikat weaves of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and the Patola of Gujarat is that the patola uses eight ply silk yarn while the imitation don't.

The technique in Orissa is bandna which resembles the patola. Weavers are from salvi, Bhulia Meher, Gandia-Patra and other castes. The old fabrics of Baragarh, Sonapur and Naupatna areas features a great variety of motifs- fish, birds, lions, elephants, deer, flowers, creepers and stars.

Bandhni is the other imitation of patola which is from Gujarat is extremely delicate and intricate in design. It is produced by tying individual parts of the fabric before dyeing. The process entails folding the cloth, stamping the design on it, bunching infinitesimal portions of it along the design outlines, and tying each one of these with cotton yarn. The cloth used in bandhani is mulmul, cotton, georgette or silk.

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